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ABSTRACT

American society needs a system of lifelong learning; the ability of the American people to live and work together in self-government is not keeping pace with the demands of today's complex and increasingly troubled society. To achieve an effective and balanced system of adult and continuing education in the United States it is essential that the role of the Coalition of Adult Education organizations be formalized and strengthened, so that it can assume the leadership in the achievement of the following Imperatives for Action: eliminating educational deficiencies of American adults; strengthening of adult and continuing education efforts of community colleges, colleges, and universities; providing adult and continuing education in the arts and humanities, public affairs, and in the democratic process; improving financial support for adult and continuing education; providing adequate and appropriate opportunities in adult and continuing education for persons in low income groups; strengthening within educational institutions the supporting structures for adult and continuing education; urging national non-governmental organizations to strengthen their role; increasing public awareness; and achieving higher levels of federal support and coordination. (mf)

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IMPERATIVES FOR ACTION

GALAXY CONFERENCE ON ADULT EDUCATION

Washington, D. C.
December 6-10, 1969

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IMPERATIVES FOR ACTION

In planning for the Galaxy Conference on Adult Education it was agreed that a statement of IMPERATIVES FOR ACTION in adult and continuing education should be developed for presentation at the conference to be held in Washington, D.C., December 6-11, 1969. Ernest E. McMahon, Dean of the University Extension Division, Rutgers University, was named chairman of a committee to develop a first draft of these imperatives.

On November 13-15, 1969, a group of distinguished citizens under the chairmanship of Arthur S. Flemming, President of Macalester College, met at the Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin, to consider the McMahon committee report. Host to this meeting was the Johnson Foundation.

Presented herein are the IMPERATIVES FOR ACTION on which those at the Wisconsin meeting reached general agreement. It is not to be assumed that each participant necessarily subscribes to all of the recommendations. Still, the document does represent a consensus, and all who were at Wingspread are in agreement on the urgent need for action.

In presenting these IMPERATIVES FOR ACTION, we extend a special word of appreciation to the Johnson Foundation for having made the Wingspread meeting possible.

EDUCATION OF ADULTS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

IMPERATIVES FOR ACTION

The ability of the American people to live and work together in self-government is not keeping pace with the demands of today's complex and increasingly troubled society. We are losing ground because in the past we have too often failed to measure up to our democratic ideals, and in the present we are failing to develop an ever stronger sense of community and cooperation among all segments of society.

On the one hand, millions are denied equal opportunity to develop and exercise their full potentialities. On the other hand, millions, despite educational and other advantages, are unable to understand and unwilling to accept the reforms and innovations necessary for peaceful accommodation.

The American people desperately need an adequate system of life-long learning to enable us to remedy past deficiencies and to direct the forces of change toward humane ends. This lack cannot be filled merely by improving conventional schooling designed to prepare young people for the future, important as that may be. It must be filled by meeting continuous challenge with continuous response. Life-long learning must be made an all pervasive influence through which those who are responsible for today's critical decisions and choices - the adults of our nation - control the present and create the future we want.

For the achievement of these goals, it is imperative that adult and continuing education be made a vital instrument of national purpose:

To prepare each person to understand and cope with the issues of our time.

To remedy educational deficiencies.

To provide everyone with equal opportunity for meaningful work at decent pay--in preparation, access and advancement.

To function more effectively as workers, parents, neighbors, citizens.

To improve the quality of our lives--physical and spiritual, individual and social.

To enable us to share meanings, values, purposes and power with ourselves and other peoples, in a world where constructive sharing is the only alternative to mutual destruction.

The organizations which sponsor or conduct adult and continuing education include schools, colleges, libraries, correspondence agencies, radio and television stations, professional societies, businesses and industries, trade unions, the Armed Forces, governments at all levels, community action organizations, religious groups, voluntary social and welfare agencies, health and recreation units and many others.

The range of their programs includes cultural, political, professional, recreational, religious, remedial, and technical and vocational instruction. Their students are concerned with citizenship, family life, occupation, trade union organization, industrial management, business and community leadership and other interests.

Many of these activities are well supported by business, government, foundations, professional or personal sources. Many others of equal private and public importance either lack adequate support, or are not supported at all.

THE TASK

To achieve an effective and balanced system of adult and continuing education in the United States it is essential:

1. That the role of the Coalition of Adult Education Organizations be formalized and strengthened;

2. That the Coalition in turn give leadership to the establishment of a political action unit with responsibility for influencing legislation at state and Federal levels;

3. That together the Coalition and the political action unit lend fullest efforts to the achievement of the following Imperatives for Action:

I. TO ELIMINATE EDUCATIONAL DEFICIENCIES OF AMERICAN ADULTS

More than eight million Americans over the age of twenty-five have less than five years of formal schooling, and millions more lack a high school education or its equivalent. Through adult and continuing education, these millions can be raised to new educational levels that will provide them with new and improved economic, political, and social opportunities.

Illiteracy. We support the concept advanced by Commissioner of Education James Allen in his pronouncement on "The Right to Read," and urge a total commitment on the part of all adult and continuing education agencies to raising each American to a level of literacy.

High School Education for Adults. We consider the completion of high school or its equivalent by every adult to be the minimum level of educational attainment acceptable in today's complex society and urge fullest efforts to achieve this goal.

To secure these ends we urge Congress to enact legislation that will provide state and local educational agencies with annual support of $500 million.

At the same time a concerted effort must be made to secure increased funds from private industry, trade unions, private foundations, and other non-public agencies. State and local educational agencies should not only continue their present levels of funding but also increase their financial efforts.

We further urge the present administration in Washington to undertake studies to reassess on-going programs for the under-educated and make recommendations to the Congress concerning the most effective means of distributing Federal funds to community educational agencies.

II. TO STRENGTHEN ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY SERVICE EFFORTS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES, COLLEGES, AND UNIVERSITIES

The nation's need for well-informed citizens, coupled with the personal needs of its people for an understanding of the world in which they live and the skills with which to earn their livings, gives emphasis to the need for increased levels of post high school education.

We endorse the national objective set forth by the Congress, that two years of post high school education, adapted where necessary to the occupational needs of adults, be made available to all who are capable of benefiting from it.

The clear need to support adult and continuing education in community colleges, colleges, and universities was recognized by the Congress with the enactment of Title I of the Higher Education Act of 1965. Designed to support established programs of extension, to provide community services, and to assist in the establishment of such programs in institutions of higher education, Title I has proved an effective instrument. Unfortunately appropriations have lagged far behind authorizations. In the present fiscal year, Title I is funded at $9 1/2 million rather than the $50 million that was authorized.

We urge minimum annual funding of Title I of the Higher Education Act of 1965, at $100 million a year, with national priorities to be spelled out anew each year, to meet the changing needs.

III. TO PROVIDE ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION IN THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES, PUBLIC AFFAIRS, AND IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

Opportunities for life-long learning in the arts and humanities, and in public affairs, are essential to the preservation of our freedoms. To solve problems rationally and peacefully, we must continually acquire new social and political competencies, and the powerful and privileged must learn equally with the powerless and deprived.

There is an over-riding urgency for people to be informed and to be equipped to make informed judgments in matters that strike to the heart of our democratic society. To this end we urge major funding of programs of adult and continuing education in public affairs and in the democratic process.

Of equal importance is the need for each person to experience the fullest flowering of the human spirit. To achieve this goal we urge greatly expanded funding for the National Endowment for the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

IV. TO IMPROVE FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

Much of adult and continuing education is dependent on income from tuition and fees. As a result, many adults forgo instruction because they cannot afford the tuition and, in turn, agencies tend to conduct only those courses which will produce sufficient revenue. Many essential needs thus go unmet. A comprehensive program of adult and continuing education will be provided only when adult and continuing education receives financial support comparable to that presently provided to elementary, secondary and higher education.

We urge vigorous efforts to secure full funding on the part of the Congress for authorized programs serving adult and continuing education, and the development of new and imaginative programs to further meet these needs. At the same time we urge equally vigorous efforts on the part of the private sector to provide vastly expanded support and leadership.

V. TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE AND APPROPRIATE OPPORTUNITIES IN ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR PERSONS IN LOW INCOME GROUPS

Most adult and continuing education programs fail to reach low income and under-educated groups. Instead, programs draw largely from well-educated middle class groups. The reasons are numerous and sometimes difficult to ascertain. One factor is financial. Courses and workshops that must be self-supporting will draw only those students who are able to pay. Consequently they will meet only the educational needs of the more affluent. Further, most promotional materials are printed and, therefore, appeal essentially to a more literate clientele. Both the programs and the communications relating to them are aimed at the middle and upper economic groups.

New and aggressive programs must be instituted with a view to increasing the percentage of enrollments of low income and under-educated students.

Educational programs must be taken into the neighborhoods where people live rather than being conducted mainly in central facilities such as schools, colleges and universities.

Existing programs of adult and continuing education must be examined to insure that they are relevant to the needs of the 80 per cent of the adult population that does not presently participate in such programs.

New and effective multi-media programs must be undertaken.

VI. TO STRENGTHEN WITHIN OUR EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS THE SUPPORTING STRUCTURES FOR ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

Adult and continuing education is too often thought of as being apart from the traditional educational process. It is seldom integrated with the elementary and secondary

establishment and its status in higher education is ill defined. Adult and continuing education must become a recognized responsibility of the educational establishment, must achieve its full commitment and support, and must attain fuller public understanding of its vital importance to society.

VII. TO URGE NATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS TO STRENGTHEN THEIR ROLE

We recognize the importance of national non-governmental voluntary organizations in providing adult and continuing education, and urge these groups to strengthen their role and expand their efforts so that society may receive increased benefits from the full utilization of these unique resources.

VIII. TO INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS

A national campaign should be launched to acquaint Americans with the importance of life-long learning, and to gain their greater support for adult and continuing education.

IX. TO ACHIEVE HIGHER LEVELS OF FEDERAL SUPPORT AND COORDINATION

The United States Government should establish appropriate instrumentalities to provide leadership in adult and continuing education and to develop cooperation among the many public organizations operating in this field.

ERIC Clearinghouse
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on Adult Education

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